



Tourists and locals alike frequent one of the many sidewalks cafes in the old city for a taste of the Burgundian lifestyle.

Eat, drink and be merry in Maastricht

If you're looking to explore the Netherlands, head to Maastricht. A visit to Maastricht is about relishing the good life. Enjoying the outdoors, eating well and strolling along the cobblestoned streets are all part of the lure for tourists who visit this Dutch city.

"Maastricht has an old world feeling. Amsterdam is like going to Disneyland — it's not quite real. Maastricht is a hidden gem," said LaDonna Davis, a U.S. Army employee who works for U.S. Army Garrison Schinnen.

It is the oldest city in the country and began as a Roman settlement about 2,000 years ago.

Now the city is a bustling urban center: the capital of the province,

birthplace of the euro and home to what some say is the greatest art and antiques fair in the world.

Art collector's mecca

The European Fine Arts Fair brought more than 220 leading art and antiques dealers to the city this year. They, in turn, brought art worth more than \$1 billion with works by Monet, Picasso, Warhol, Cezanne, Degas and others. The NY Art Magazine estimates "that around 70 percent of the Old Masters available for sale on the market at any time can be seen at TEFAF."

"It's the Metropolitan Museum of Art, only with price tags," said one modern art dealer from New York City at this year's fair.

It's a collector's paradise, but if you're willing to pay €55 you can get closer to the art than any museum would ever allow while rubbing elbows with the rich and famous (Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's wealthiest citizen and former prime minister, shopped there this year). It is a refined affair for a civilized city.

Burgundian lifestyle

"Maastricht has a certain elegance," said Rita Hoefnagels, a Dutch employee at USAG Schinnen. "It is known for its Burgundian style," she said. "You'll find a large number of restaurants and pubs. Limburgers love to go out — to eat and have fun. Good food and good drinks — you enjoy life that way."

By this definition the people of Maastricht do indeed enjoy life. A stroll through the old city center on a sunny day takes you past numerous sidewalk cafes with hardly an empty seat. If you're looking for French, Belgium, Mediterranean, Dutch or Greek cuisine, or a cool libation, you will certainly find it here.

Brown cafes

This charming town of only 130,000 people has several Michelin-starred restaurants. If these are out of your price range you may want to

consider dining at one of the 300 pubs and cafes in Maastricht. There is a certain class of pub in the Netherlands, called a “brown cafe.” These establishments are tiny wood-paneled pubs that serve inexpensive, hearty meals.

De Bobbel, at Wolfstraat 32, is one such cafe. The name is Dutch slang meaning a bottle for storing gin, said Taco Van der Bijl, De Bobbel’s owner. The interior is dark and cool with only seven or eight tables. The floor is bare wood with sawdust strewn about. Food is served until 5 p.m. (after which you’ll only find liquid refreshment). While the kitchen is open you can get several types of soup (French onion, pea or goulash), a generous serving of quiche, sandwiches, a sweet and sour stew, or a choice of scampi dishes for less than €.

More casual dining can be found on the street. Belgium waffles are a popular street food. Sidewalk stands serve the warm, sweet, chewy waffles dusted with powdered sugar straight off the griddle to hungry shoppers and tourists. The trans fat scare seems to be ignored here. At friet stands, friet (or fries) are the best seller. You can see scores of people lined up outside the shops waiting for a big serving of fries in a paper cone, served with mayo and other sauces on the side.

Gourmet tasting event

Food takes center stage Aug. 23-26 at an international cuisine tasting event called “Preuvenemint.” Diners can choose between 40 restaurant and bar tents and smaller food stalls, all of them offering tasty treats. Payment is by prepaid vouchers. Each voucher costs €1.70. Every eatery has at least one item that you can taste for two vouchers, according to the event’s website, www.preuvenemint.nl. Finer cuisine is more expensive. The live music and entertainment are free.

A city for shopping

Besides eating, Maastrichters love to shop. In 2004, Dutch citizens voted Maastricht as the best city in the country for shopping. On Groote Staat, the main shopping street, you’ll find European department stores, designer shops, interior stores with home accessories and furniture, jewelers, antique shops and galleries. There are some architectural surprises too. A 13th



For 1,500 years Maastricht residents put up walls to protect their city. Now, they provide a quaint backdrop while visitors enjoy an afternoon beverage.

century Dominican church is now a book shop, and right next to it, cobblestoned medieval streets give way to a multi-level chrome and glass open-air shopping mall.

Weekend visitors will find the shops in Maastricht are open the first Sunday of the month from noon to 5 p.m.

No language barriers

Dutch is not the easiest language to pick up but tourists do not need to worry about language barriers. “The Dutch are probably one of the nicest bunch of people,” said Patty Anderson, the Book Mark manager at USAG Schinnen. “They are fantastic. Most of them speak English. You don’t have to learn Dutch before you go.”

More on Maastricht

Touring Maastricht
The best way to tour the city is on foot. Visitors can pick up walking tour maps for a few euros at the Maastricht Tourist Office, known as the VVV, at Kleine Staat 1. This office can arrange for hotels, concert tickets and guided tours. Call civ (0031) 43 325 2121 or visit their website at [www.info@vvvmaastricht .nl](http://www.info@vvvmaastricht.nl).

TEFAF

Next year’s European Fine Arts Fair will be held March 7-16 at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre. Visit www.tefaf.com.

The surrounding area

If you want to impress your friends by saying you’ve been in three countries at once, head to Vaals. You’ll find the exact point where the German, Dutch and Belgium borders meet. It’s also the highest point in the Netherlands (323 meters above sea level) and the largest maze in Europe is here. Vaals is about 15 miles from Maastricht.

Valkenburg is about 10 miles east of Maastricht. Years ago it was a resort where wealthy Europeans came to take the waters. Now, you can visit castle ruins, caves, quarries and mines, spas and any number of restaurants and cafes.

Seven miles east of Maastricht you’ll find the Margraten American Cemetery — the final resting place for 8,301 Americans killed in World War II.



Cyclists pedal over the Maas River on the main pedestrian crossing, Sint Servaas Bridge, built in the 13th century.